Icon for East Frame

Sixteen-metre tall VAKA ‘A HINA by Sēmisi Fetokai Potauaine will be a symbol of solidarity and unity – a lasting legacy of hope

A striking, sixteen-metre tall, totem-esque sculpture is planned for Christchurch’s East Frame, adding a touch of Tongan and Aotearoa New Zealand culture to further complement the city’s cultural diversity and understanding. VAKA ‘A HINA by Tavakefai`ana Sēmisi Fetokai Potauaine is expected to be in place at its location in Rauora Park – on the eastern fringe of the central city – before the end of 2019.

Borne out of a collaborative project, SCAPE Public Art is undertaking this work in partnership with Christchurch City Council, Creative New Zealand, Ītākaro Ltd, John Jones Steel, GHD and Leihgs Construction. It will be funded by these Christchurch businesses and a public fundraising campaign, to be gifted to the city.

Described as a beacon, meeting point, and way finder, VAKA ‘A HINA will be a new point of reference in a refreshed part of the city. It provides another opportunity to connect with the community and to celebrate cultural differences.

The sculpture will have a tall, resolute, continuous presence during day and night. A lighting scheme created by GHD will further enhance VAKA ‘A HINA’s stature. A spectrum of colours is available providing the ability to customise illumination for special occasions; from green for St Patrick’s Day, to pink for Breast Cancer awareness.

SCAPE Public Art Executive Director Deborah McCormick said, “VAKA ‘A HINA is a combination of Pacific Island cultural significance and striking geometry which embodies the uniqueness of all the different people who make up our community.”

“Public art has the power to reflect our city’s true identity and developing narrative. At this time when harmony, respect, compassion and understanding have the power to provide resilience, VAKA ‘A HINA becomes more than a visual cue of cultural diversity – it is an opportunity for sharing, questioning, learning, understanding and change.”

Ancient Tongan and Moana Oceania (Pacific) folklore provide the background story for VAKA ‘A HINA (translating to English as ‘Vessel of Hina’). Hina is a Tongan goddess who lives on the moon above the langi (sky) in vāvā (outer space) and travels frequently back and forth to maama (earth). VAKA ‘A HINA can be imagined as the vessel or receptacle she uses as transportation on these intergalactic trips – it’s her vaka (canoe) – thus evoking ideas of travel, motion and movement.

The sculptor, who has lived and worked in Christchurch, is an Auckland-based Tongan architect, lecturer, researcher and a multimedia artist.
Sēmisi Fetokai Potauaine explains the artwork and its setting in Christchurch.

“As a concept and practice, VAKA ‘A HINA points to the intersection or connection and separation of tā (time) and vā (space), on the abstract level, and kohi (lines) and va (spaces), on the concrete level, in the production of kupesi (elaborate and complex geometric designs), which move in multidirectional and multidimensional ways.”

“As a means of transportation, transformation or projection, VAKA ‘A HINA gives a sense of flight and escape into the realm of vāvā (outer space) away from the domain of vaha (seascape) on maama (Earth), where navigation as an art is conducted at their intersection or connection and separation,” Potauaine added.

“With the recent tragedy in the city, I do hope the presence of VAKA ‘A HINA as a way finder offers relief to those who have been stricken and provides connection to those who have been separated.”

VAKA ‘A HINA will be the 15th legacy (permanent) artwork produced by SCAPE Public Art for Christchurch. SCAPE’s significant contribution of public art is enabled through a business model of close collaboration between art and business.

John Jones Steel has been an industry stalwart of SCAPE Public Art for over 20 years and is again the major benefactor making VAKA ‘A HINA’s permanence possible.

Managing Director of John Jones Steel Frank Van Schaijik said, “We are structural steel fabricators who call Christchurch home and have been heavily involved in the rebuild and life here. Public art supports our vision for a diverse and eclectic city that’s accessible to all, and we’re proud to be able to give back to the community through SCAPE’s creative projects.”

“The sculpture will certainly be eye-catching – at sixteen metres high – that’s approximately over a five storey building in height. I am looking forward to seeing it on the skyline and showing it off to family and friends.”

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Please refer to high resolution image folder here
About the Artist

Sēmisi Fetokai Potauaine works as a multi-media artist, across a number of disciplines, notably architecture, sculpture, tattooing, painting, weaving and computer graphic designing. Sēmisi was born, raised and trained in the old culture in Tonga, and educated in Aotearoa New Zealand and abroad in art and architecture. His practice, lectures and research concentrates on ta–va (time and space), culture and language, theory and practice and, art and literature amongst others. He has co-authored books and book chapters, published book chapters and journal articles, and is the principal illustrator of a new Pacific children’s book series.

In 2017, he was commissioned to create MANUĒSINA (White bird/White angel) for Sculpture on the Gulf at Waiheke Island. He was commissioned in 2012 for the production of the Ministry of Tourism Tonga for Tunavakamea & Hinavakamea, two 8 metre high steel sculptures for Nuku`alofa’s waterfront. He was awarded the Commonwealth International Connections Art Residencies 2009, where he produced a number of works ranging from graphic art to steel and wood sculptures at Cambridge University, United Kingdom.
About the SCAPE Public Art Trust

SCAPE Public Art installs public art in Christchurch all year round with a focus on the annual Seasons. SCAPE is the Christchurch expert in the installation of public art, and the SCAPE Public Art Seasons are New Zealand's premier public art events.

Held in Christchurch’s central city public spaces and supported through a range of partnerships, the Seasons showcase leading national and international contemporary artists, and provide a springboard for emerging local talent. Artworks in the Seasons are created as a result of close collaboration between art and business. This is a highly regarded model world-wide.

Our Seasons provide an opportunity to focus on the introduction of new artworks whilst maintaining focus on the impressive base of legacy pieces. www.scapepublicart.org.nz

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